

CHAPTER 13

MISGUIDED PATRIOTISM

THERE IS no questioning the patriotism of men who, like Charles E. Wilson, give freely of their talents, experience and energy to the political establishment. The motives of these businessmen are of the highest. Their wisdom is another matter, and even they must at times question it. In helping the bureaucracy to further its purposes, are they acting in the best interest of their country? Will their sacrifices make this a better land for their children to live in?

We must not confuse these men with the obscene and ubiquitous five-percenters, the hired hyenas of the business world who grin their way through the labyrinth that is Washington. In all probability the firms they represent are incompetents of the same moral stripe, managing to keep

one step ahead of the sheriff only with the help of government contracts and loans. This certainly is true of those who shore up their rickety affairs by borrowing from the RFC and other lending agencies.

Then there is another kind of "businessman" who must be written off. He is the man of means who has given up on the American tradition and is "buying insurance" against future reprisal. Having accepted the trend toward collectivism as inevitable, this fellow "comes to the aid of the country" with substantial contributions (sometimes through foundations) to movements and individuals who, in his judgment, are on the "winning" side. His motives are as sordid as his thinking is shallow. He is doomed to extinction by the thing he is helping to bring about.

The wisdom in question is that of the capable and unselfish entrepreneur who, answering the call of duty, as he sees it, permits himself to be drawn into the Washington vortex, either as a stand-in bureaucrat or as an unwilling contractor.

The case of a reputable New York engineering firm is in point. It is unthinkable that this old and successful concern ever solicited government business. How it got into it is not public knowledge, but the fact is that it has become a "finder" for the bureaucracy. When an agency is confronted with a procurement problem involving technological know-how, it puts the matter before this firm, which in turn sets its operatives to the task of finding the available skill and equipment. If the existing facilities have to be adapted to the Government's needs, their extensive engineering knowledge is at hand. If finances are needed, a Wall Street connection is contacted, and since a government contract is assured, the financial problem is solved as expeditiously as the manufacturing problem. The bureaucracy has scored a hit.

Through such methods many an entrepreneur who might

be rendering a social service is sucked into the collectivistic maelstrom. Unwittingly, and in some cases unwillingly, he becomes a tool of the State. Refusal to cooperate is possible, but what with the suggested taint of unpatriotism, or extinguishment through lack of supplies, or the danger of reprisal, only the most intrepid idealist would buck the suave bureaucratic bully. The profit-motive is, of course, always present—who is free of it?—but the fact is that as the economy becomes more and more politically controlled the area of private initiative is delimited, and then the question is not profit but existence.

But what of liberty? What of America's future? The time has come when the American businessman, along with all other citizens, must face up to fundamentals, and without equivocation. Does one help one's country by helping the bureaucrat out of a difficulty created by the bureaucrat, or is one a better patriot by refusing to cooperate?

II

The bureaucrat is completely incapable of making a useful thing. He talks about the virtues of a controlled economy, but when it comes to making any part of the economy work he is helpless. He has no equipment for it. All his training has been directed toward the acquisition and exercise of power. He can fashion laws, make phrases, manipulate situations, lie convincingly, deal under the table of protocol. He cannot raise an onion or cobble a shoe. He is lost when his lust for power compels him to look into the practical problems of production. It is then that he calls in a businessman.

If the politician could do it himself, would he call in a Wilson? Why share the glory of achievement with his intended victim? Besides, the businessman has a set of values that is entirely out of place in the political world, and his presence there is bound to be irritating. His insistence on

results, with the least expenditure of effort and without regard to personalities, is out of line with the point of view that the only result worthwhile is political preferment.

Because of this basic contradiction, it is necessary that the businessman either adapt himself to the political cosmos or get out.

If the businessman succumbs to political perversion, the cause is usually his own naiveté. His unfamiliarity with and distaste for political thinking invariably gets him into some impasse from which he is incapable of extricating himself. Perhaps he has said something that results in a "bad press," or maybe he has signed an honest report that is politically unpalatable to some "higher up." He is bewildered by the reaction; such a thing never came up in his career. At this point, an ingenious "middle" bureaucrat—an entrenched civil service operative in the higher echelon—soothingly takes his superior in hand and leads him out of the difficulty. From that point on the businessman leans more and more on his savior—and he becomes a politician at heart. He sinks into protocol, lending his knowledge and talents to the purposes of politics, and forgets about the job he was supposed to do.

If, on the other hand, he is made of sterner stuff, his position will be made intolerable enough to compel him to throw it all up. The case of Mr. Wilson is illustrative. He was called in by Mr. Truman when the Korean affair started. Everything was at sixes-and-sevens in Washington; under the circumstances, Mr. Truman could think of no way out but the regimentation of private life—the only cure-all in the politician's pharmacopia. How to do it? He reached out into industry for help. Now that the "emergency" has settled into regularity, the need for Mr. Wilson is not so urgent, and those in the know have rightly predicted his resignation. He has made enemies. No one, not even he himself, will know

exactly how this was brought about; but it is a certainty that he leaves public life with a depreciated reputation; the boys have seen to that.

Nevertheless, he has served the purpose of the bureaucracy. He has set up the machinery for control, he has created a lot of plush jobs for the gang, and he has taken on himself the onus for the whole business. He has made the Fair Deal bigger and better—just as the businessman in the thirties “patriotically” came to the aid of the New Deal in another “emergency.”

III

What must be the end-result of the mesalliance of business and politics? Just as bad money destroys the value of good money, so the virus of political intrusion into the body economic must undermine its health and ultimately wreck it. Private enterprise must go.

In the light of experience, we cannot come to any other conclusion than that if and when Socialism or Communism or Fascism—the political control of our way of living—comes to America and wipes out our tradition of freedom, its advent will have been facilitated by the misguided patriotism of the capitalist. Roosevelt and his starry-eyed social workers hadn't the slightest idea of how to put their “more abundant life” into operation until management showed them a way: the businessmen worked out the details of the NRA and practical farmers helped organize the AAA. Likewise, the Fair Deal would have crashed on the rocks of ineptitude if private enterprise had not steered it to shore.

To put it bluntly: Communism will not be imported from Moscow; it will come out of Wall Street and Main Street. It will show up as a disease internally induced by bad habits, not the least of which is the growing practice of capitalists

to come to the aid of the political establishment, in peacetime as well as wartime.

Putting aside that large element of the fraternity whose Americanism consists only of an immediate profit, and thinking of those who consort with politics because they consider it their duty as citizens, we must lay the error of their ways either to ignorance of basic principle or shortsightedness in temporizing with it. The basic principle, derived from all history, is that government is a necessary evil, not a means toward a good end, and that any course that tends to increase the power of government must deplete the power in the people governed. That is, there is an unending struggle between State and Society.

The Declaration of Independence—which is the definitive expression of Americanism—recognized that conflict by stipulating the limits of government. “For these purposes men institute government,” it says. And what are these purposes? To safeguard the “unalienable rights”—the rights that inhere in the individual by virtue of his existence and are derived not from his government but from his Creator. That is all. When government goes beyond this limitation it is a transgressor; so says the Declaration.

So then, true patriotism, faithfulness to the American tradition, demands a skeptical attitude toward politics. It must be presumed, *a priori*, that the politician’s business is never to further the area of freedom, he has no interest in it, and that he is rather concerned with expanding his own area of activity. Hence, he must be kept constantly under surveillance. Cooperation with his schemes is dangerous to the interest of Society. The best the capitalist can do for his country, for his children, is to oppose intervention at every point, regardless of immediate consequences, and never to lend his prestige or capacities to the political establishment.